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OPUS CHRISTI.

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WHAT did Jesus do? This is a question which is forced upon the religious thought of the day, and that from two distinct quarters. In itself, the present age is avowedly practical; perhaps, too much so. It measures tendencies by their ability to produce results, and is thus in direct opposition to anything whose character is simply contemplative, or whose nature is merely a matter for thought. But this is not all; the spirit of the present, so far as its passing features are decipherable, is domineered by the conceptions of energy and progress.

What did Jesus really do? Did he, in the realization of his sublimely conceived mission, simply make the path of civilization somewhat smoother? Or did he rather, by an act, perfect a new life whose final principles extend beyond the range of human existence? The work of Jesus, conceived in the light of its actual performance, cannot be kept upon the plane of the earthly; but it must not be so screened from rational analysis that mankind, which sorely needs its fruits, shall lose sight of it. When Jesus said, "I have overcome the world," he announced his great achievement. The result was a positive fact. Jesus thus made possible, not a new view of life, but a new life itself. That which was produced was the result, not of mere teaching, but of positive labor. The deed of Christ is as real as his teaching.

The sphere of Christ's activity, as we must ever remember, was the sphere of universal religion. His work was carried on in keeping with an exalted view of human life; two thousand years of culture have only deepened this impression. In science and philosophy, quite different views of man's life are entertained, and the way in which these forms of human culture have served the world varies accordingly. Science regards life from the standpoint of the actually existent, and when it is asked, "What

has science done for life?" the answer must be: It has contributed *utility*. Invention and discovery have promoted industry, and have made social intercourse feasible. Philosophy has acted otherwise, for it laid emphasis upon the ideal; it has evinced the *value* of life, and has shown the dignity of human existence. But religion, while not releasing its anchorage upon reality, has gone beyond this and has imparted *blessedness*. The gift of Jesus was eternal life, and he must be regarded not as a benefactor or an educator, but as a Savior.

When therefore the inner character of a deed is appreciated, the religious work of Christ can be more satisfactorily seen. The person of Christ, studied as it is today, is such as to appeal directly to man's religious consciousness, where it is seen that Jesus, in living his peculiar life, evinced the fact of man's spiritual destiny under God. In the same manner may the performance of Christ be esteemed, and his activity becomes a distinct factor in the life of mankind. What Jesus did no other has done nor could do, and his career is seen to be a service at once intrinsic and valuable. In it blessedness is to be found.

From the point of view of the New Testament, the work of Christ is to be regarded directly and for its own sake. This book, which is not only the coronation of religious literature, but an isolated phenomenon in the history of humanity, contains chiefly an account of Christ's career in Palestine, and the effect which it had upon the world. The New Testament as a whole is engaged in representing the supreme act of Jesus Christ. The language which is employed by these plain writers is striking in its directness; a favorite form of expression is: "And it came to pass." Philosophy may have its universal ideas, appreciable by thought; and science may deal in general principles of those things which appeal to sense; but Christianity falls back upon that which has come to pass. The one great thing which is portrayed in the New Testament is an event; the writers of that volume were plainly convinced that something had taken place. There were many things which Jesus did, and various impressions which he made upon the mind of the day; but these unify in one great deed.

Jesus' life may be viewed as constituting a career. His character was unique, but none the less so was that peculiar thing which he attempted to perform. For Christ the work of his career was a striking achievement; and here the value of that career may be found. Many were the things that Jesus did not do; and many the fields of activity into which he did not enter. Having a definitely spiritual work to accomplish, his achievement was a religious one. Christ made no scientific discovery; he did not directly contribute to philosophy; political power was, as an ambition, far removed from him. Indeed, the moment any other than a purely religious performance is mentioned, we see how alien it was from the intention of Christ to accomplish. Now, what Christ thus achieved is of the greatest importance. His service was the highest, and it benefited all mankind. A statesman may serve his nation; a scientist his generation; a poet may sing to multitudes for centuries. Each, however, has a limited field and an inevitably prescribed influence. But a religious view of Christ can only see that he benefits mankind forever: his gift was eternal life. The deed of Christ had none of the limits of human specialization; his was an endless work made complete by his peculiar power.

Perhaps this estimation of the position of Christ in the world, where we lay emphasis upon the ideas of event and career, performance and service, is not the usual one, which is given in theology. But theological reflection should be friendly to such a view as this, which endeavors to relate the life of Christ to those methods of thought which are employed in the philosophy of religion. Theology has ever had its doctrine of the work of Christ; but it has usually regarded this *opus* in its own peculiar manner. The work of Christ as thus viewed was the work of redemption. But it would seem as though this theological interpretation of the deed of Christ were of no value, unless the more realistic side of this is taken into account. The work of Jesus was, in part, what he did in his career; when this is once appreciated, in the spirit of positive religion, then the true point of departure is found and the projection of the actual work of Christ into the sphere of the ideal made possible. Thus the

historic deed of Jesus is the anchorage of the *opus* of redemption.

The deed of Christ, then, becomes intelligible in the light of his career as a religious character; and we are able to state in fairly accurate language the meaning of the work which he performed. As a rule, the deed of Jesus is put in a peculiar form, and it is never an easy task to restate theology in the form of individual psychology and social history. Yet the religious consciousness can never forget that it was by a mighty deed that Jesus was approved among men; and it now desires to know just what it was that he did. In the gospels is to be found a definite account of Christ's career; the epistles show how the Christian community was affected by the idea of what Jesus had done for them. When the believer sees how vast a work has been wrought for him, he cannot fail to find the features of this service outlined in the actual history of Jesus of Nazareth; and if faith does not at once become sight, the sense of dependence, which the soul feels as inspired by Christ, is measured by the perception that the actual Christ is worthy of this.

The historical side of Christ's *opus* is being appreciated in more than one way. In general, the philosophy of religion has emancipated the positive element in human faith and has not failed to evince the importance of this. At the same time, popular thought has begun to manifest an extraordinary interest in the actual performance of Christianity's Founder, and asks, in addition to this: "What would Jesus do, now?" As long as this phase of Christian thought avoids the danger of superficiality, it can add much in the way of valuable content to the actual life of Christendom. The inner character of the positive in religion must be appreciated, and the worth of a deed clearly estimated. Religion as lived out in the race, and as reflected in history, is ever destined to lay emphasis upon certain events which have happened; these are fraught with enormous significance. In place of mere thoughts, there must be living ideas, wrought out by human experience; if logic fears lest it be losing, life certainly can feel that it is gaining. The history of religion contains many such vital conceptions. In the history of Judaism, what

was more important than the variously repeated statement, "Israel came out of Egypt"? The New Testament has its own favorite ideas, and these manifestly guided the thought and inspired the life of those times. "Jesus was born in Bethlehem," "Christ is risen from the dead"—such were the thoughts which the pioneer Christian fed upon.

For the Christian religion the various phenomena were made possible by the deed of Jesus. The teaching, peculiar as it was to him, was there as well; but the *onus* of Christianity, as given in the New Testament, is borne by the religious performance of Christ. This must be the starting-point of any theory of his personality. For both the theology and the philosophy of religion this is an important consideration. Before theology can go on to construct a theory of Christ's work of redemption, it must learn to appreciate what transpired in the historical career of the Man of Nazareth; then it may proceed to speculate concerning Christ's empirical activity. But the philosophy of religion, likewise, should not fail to observe such a striking example of what the religious spirit can accomplish; and, busied with the manifold phenomena of ethnic religion, it cannot help responding to the incitement made upon it by one like Christ. What he did was, in its results to human existence, manifest in various phases of culture, especially religion. But how much discernment is requisite to bring out the import of this great deed!

The details of the work performed by Christ cannot be put into so many words; yet some account of them must be taken. It may be shown how different was his mission from that of the average man. His *opus* was not found within the rubric of human activity. Man works in various ways and from more than one motive; among his springs of action may be necessity and desire, law and custom. In response to these, works and days are determined. But over and above these rather mechanical impulses, we may note how manifold are the works which men perform; current civilization, with all its spheres of occupation, at once shows how vivid is the thought of the acts which make up the life of man. What control these? In general, talent and genius; these constitute the call to labor. Self-satisfaction

and social approbation add an impetus to those things which man by sheer need produces; here arise great deeds of great men. But this outline of humanity's occupation does not for a moment suggest what Jesus really did. Nor do the more definitely ethical motives explain the marvelous character of his work. He obeyed the law, but his work was not the exemplification of current morality; he went about doing good, but no one can settle accounts with his character by merely styling him a philanthropist.

It was native to Christ that he should transcend all such limits. His deed was a free contribution to the human spirit. In performing it he was disclosing a new realm of life and was not readjusting old elements to one another. As a personality, bent upon doing a most benign work, Christ appealed to John as one "full of grace and truth;" in this spirit did he carry on his work. Now, a character filled with goodness and truth is that which the Old Testament ascribed to Jehovah; Christ, whose career in the world is strikingly represented in John's prologue, seems worthy of a similar description. The work of Jesus was godlike, and in pursuing it he assumed a character of godliness.

In the consciousness of Christ himself, the performance which he was undertaking was conceived of as being the work of God. "My Father worketh even until now, and I work." Elsewhere, among the golden sayings which again and again appear in the gospels, Christ spoke of himself as present with his disciples, even unto the end of the world; and as having power to overcome the world. In keeping with these expressions of infinite presence and power is the one which has been quoted, where Jesus stands as about to perform the work of God. We easily conceive of Christ as delivering a divine message, and accordingly regard him as a teacher sent from God; but may we not also regard him as acting in a divine manner, as God might be conceived of as acting? Jesus in his career performed the work of God; this is the general import of the gospels.

It was in response to a call that this deed was performed; Christ felt that it was for him to do the will of God. In doing

this, he was not simply obeying a heavenly law, but was producing a divine result in the world; and Christ's activity was ever accompanied by the idea that he was joining with the heavenly Father in some vast enterprise. This he understood, though others may have misconstrued his meaning. He heard a voice from heaven saying, "I will glorify my name." Some said "It thundered;" and a physical manifestation seemed to be present before them. Others said, "An angel spake to him;" and these looked toward the realm of psychic phenomena. But Jesus knew that it was the voice of God. Apart from any theological conception, it cannot be doubted that Jesus conducted his life as though he were acting for God. Such a fact stands out as one of the phenomena in the history of Christianity.

As a result of this motive on the part of Christ, his work assumed a peculiar character; this can be explained only as we carry out the assumption that he was performing the *opus* of God. Thus he went about as God *incognito*; and mankind experienced, though unconsciously, a dynamic epiphany. Such was the form this work assumed in the mind of Galileans and Judeans. We need not now inquire whether their logic was sound when they concluded that this man was the Son of God; we need only note that with sanity and soberness of mind they expressed themselves as finding in Christ what they found elsewhere only in the mind of God. The impression which Christ by his activity made was not only a profound one, but it was peculiar to him, and could be understood only as it referred to God as its ultimate source.

Comparable to the motive and character of this work were the means which Christ employed. These he drew from his own resources. With men, more than one method is employed in producing results. Chief among them is force; yet this is probably the lowest form of operation which may engage a human will. Superior to force, in character and abiding result, is instruction, for this appeals to the intelligence. And better than instruction is example, whose subtle influence it is difficult for anyone to withstand. Persuasion is, perhaps, the highest of those efforts which may be put forth by a human soul in its

activity. But Christ's means of operation were beyond these devices of man; and, even though we cannot accurately style or introspectively analyze his influence, we know that the same can be felt. It is here that the testimony of psychology must be evoked, and a direct appeal made to the religious consciousness. Jesus appealed to sources in the human soul hitherto unknown. Popular thought may call this means the method of love; apostolic testimony is to the effect that the love of Christ toward the disciple is of constraining power. But, apart from any set characterization, the fact may be recorded that the work of Christ was appreciated by the most essential form of the soul's life.

The actual result of the great deed of Christ must be found in the field of history. That which was attempted was stupendous as a project; but the accomplished result was none the less remarkable. Paul adjusts Christ to the ages by calling him the second Adam. Certainly a beginning was made in the career of humanity, and it was brought about by one who rediscovered good and bad. Ethical science cannot fail to note the marked transmutation of values which was inaugurated by Christ. Art likewise does not fail to show what a new creation had been effected; the plastic of Praxiteles is one thing, that of Angelo another. Where philosophy felt the effect of Christ's appearance it was not as due to any metaphysics which he advocated, but by the deed which he performed. By virtue of this latter, genuine spiritual life was made possible. Human life did not fail to note what had come to pass; ancient resignation suddenly took on the form of aspiration.

But the religious character of Christ's career is the predominating trait; a general conception of human activity, a particular view of Christ's performance, and a detailed analysis of what he did, must all culminate in one great undertaking in religion. Here it must be emphasized that the effect which Christ produced upon the religious consciousness was by virtue of his deed rather than his doctrine. The apostles, in writing about their Lord, barely emphasize his teaching about the kingdom of heaven; but they do not fail to evince the importance of his work. In this way, Christ made a direct appeal to men, saying,

"Behold!" Then they saw what he had done. As the result of this method of activity on his part, Christ assumes the character of a vast personality. The history of human life and human culture makes this manifest. But how may this relation be expressed? Christ performed a godlike deed for mankind; what then is he to the religious life? To this it may be answered: Christ is the supreme object of religion, when this is studied according to the psychologico-historical method. For science, the world is the one great subject; for philosophy, the mind; for theology, God; for religion, Jesus Christ. At any rate, the religious consciousness of Christendom keeps putting Jesus in some such position as this, regarding him as the object of its thought.

Religion, in the purified form of Christianity, lays hold of its Lord in a very determined manner; the world, the mind, and God are no more definite objects of human attention than is the person of Jesus. What then may be said of the position which he occupies in the mind of mankind? At once it may be said that Christ is the *Weltgeist*. And just this word suggests the peculiar use which the speculative Hegel made for it. For him Bonaparte was the *Weltgeist*, brooding over the troubled waters of the early nineteenth century. Under the peculiar circumstances of Kantian criticism and Napoleonic politics, it was not really surprising that such a contemplative mind as Hegel's should fancy that the political activity of Napoleon might assume the form of a world-movement, not unlike the advent of a spiritual realm. And, by one of his admirers, Kant was considered as about to assume the place previously held by Jesus Christ.

Ascending by sure steps from such extravagant conclusions, we may begin to see how a vast soul, complete with resources, may fill the horizon of humanity; then we can go on to estimate the universal importance of the more likely *Weltgeist*, even Jesus the Founder of the heavenly kingdom. In the mind of the individual, and in the consciousness of the race, a supreme world-personality is a matter of expectation; the conception of one like Jesus as the Lord of human history is therefore by no means

a fanciful one; and when his importance is estimated, only some such idea is fit to express what mankind feels concerning him.

So far as the actual work of Jesus was concerned, the kingdom of God may be regarded as the one great project which he took up. Abraham perfected the covenant; Moses, the law; Jesus, the heavenly kingdom. In the last case we have a distinct religious conception, as well as a spiritual reality apprehended by religious feeling. For Jesus the kingdom was a matter of labor, although the function of teaching was not unemployed; the kingdom was his work. From the standpoint of God, the kingdom was unveiled, but from the human point of view it was created. It was not thought out, but wrought out. On this account it assumes a very different form from that which is expressed in the scientific conception of "nature," or the philosophical idea of the "world;" these appeal to the perception and reason. The kingdom, however, made its appeal to actual life, and was not so much a ready form of reality as a spiritual possibility launched by Christ.

For its field, the kingdom of God as projected by Christ had human life and human history. The supreme work of Jesus is not then a matter of opinion, but a fact of perception. So much intellectual effort has been expended in theology upon proving things, that there has been little chance for the religious mind to perceive; and so great has been the desire to justify, that no time has been left to explain. The direct view of Christ as performing a work is thus of service, not only in bringing out a distinct element in Christian thought, but in calling attention to the fact that religion is given in psychology and history, rather than in logic and metaphysics. The work of Christ in founding the kingdom, by virtue of which he becomes the true *Weltgeist* manifest in history, is thus a part of him, as also a phase of that study which is called Christology. When we look at the character of Christ, we naturally expect a great undertaking; and when we survey the history of the human spirit, we further see that he has not failed to perform the one great deed of the ages.